

Salutatory speech – Nick Kennedy '19

Hi! Good evening. How are you? My name is Nick Kennedy and I've been given the distinct privilege of being your salutatorian for the class of 2019. If you had told me, four years ago, that I'd be here tonight, getting to speak for you all, I'd have thought you were out of your mind. The idea of tonight has seemed a little like the end of the world in my head, something far-off and unimaginable - the fact that we're here, and that tonight is really the end of this beautiful chapter in my life, still hasn't really dawned on me yet. Nonetheless, my time tonight is limited, and there's a few things I'd like to say.

Now, when it comes to taking a look back at what the last four years have had to offer for us and how much we've grown and changed as a result of our experiences, I'm not sure I'm the most qualified person. As many of you already know, I wasn't here freshman year - Lock-In and open dances and all the horrific insecurity of being a freshman at Christian Brothers High school are all experiences I'm not able to attest to. Instead, I arrived, fresh-faced and one of very few transfers, at the beginning of my sophomore year - essentially having to start all over again. I'd spent a year alone, basically. As a freshman I had very few friends and I spent all my time in the library. My previous experience with high school was that students showed up, went to class, and promptly left as soon as they could. My very first day on CB's campus introduced me to a brand-new world, one that I genuinely cannot believe I get to call my home, filled with people that I am so unbelievably lucky to call my family.

I heard horror stories about high school growing up. The common trope that high school is the worst four years of your life scared me when I was a kid, and for the most part I believed it to be true. The truth of the matter is, and this might sound crazy to some of you, if I could do it all again I would. It still hasn't quite hit me yet, the realization that I'm just done - that I won't get to show up late to my B set again, that I won't get to make ramen with my friends everyday anymore, that I won't get to visit Mrs. McCarthy in the admissions office to steal her food - the list goes on and on. The world we've built for ourselves here over the last four years is a beautiful one: Christian Brothers is so full of light and fun - it has such a dynamic energy - I struggle to explain it to those who've never experienced it. CB is strange, it's a weird place, and one that strives to do so much more than just educate and graduate us. This school wanted us to be comfortable and feel at home, and every time we brought our lawn chairs onto main lawn or got to play intramural basketball in the field house we were doing just that. The fact that I woke up every day **excited** to go to school is baffling - but knowing that I got to see my best friends in the whole world and make things I'm proud of under the watch of a faculty and staff that has been nothing but loving and caring to me, how could I not be?

When I showed up in August 2016, head down and afraid of what might await me, I had people come up to me throughout the day, notice I was new, and introduce themselves or offer to have me sit with their friends at lunch. That was you, that was something you did after just a year of being here. I knew immediately that I was a part of something much bigger than myself - I was looking at a class full of tremendous love and generosity, and I've been so lucky to continue to see that love grow and change over the last three years. I've seen it at Holy Bowl and section games and senior nights, where we offer our athletes all of our love and support. I've seen it at open mic nights and art exhibits and musicals, where we constantly affirm the many artistic talents of this class. I've seen it at rallies, at dances, open houses, and fundraisers, where this class is constantly offering their time and effort just to show their dedication to CB. I've seen it at Kairos, where we've taught each other how to love and what it feels like to be loved, simply for being the people we are. And I've seen it in some of our most challenging moments, where we chose to look out for each other and support one another even in the face of great adversity.

In the weeks leading up to tonight, I wanted some broad takeaway, some great revelation about who we are and what we've been through. I'm not going to say that I have one, or that I have some great knowledge to impart. Instead, in all of my remembering and in all of my final interactions on campus this year, I realized only one

real shorthand for describing who we are as a class: everything is love. From the minute I showed up on this campus I was shown love. Each and every lunch that I spent with a new group of people, who sat with me and gave their friendship to me expecting nothing in return was an act of love. The teachers and the staff who have dedicated their lives to making Christian Brothers what it is - a community and a home for so many - have done so out of tremendous love. Every time we showed up to a sporting event or went to a dance or volunteered or went on a retreat, we did so out of love. All of us, this whole class, have been so generous and so giving of ourselves in ways that continue to surprise and impress me. And I am comfortable in knowing that's not something that ends tonight - its inside each of us, and we get to take that into whichever corner of the world awaits us.

There's a great deal of anxiety in the air this time of year - yes, we're relieved to be finished with all of the schoolwork that's plagued us for years, yes, we're excited to start our senior summer - but there's a lot that's left unanswered. What of the friendships we've built here, what happens to all of the memories we'll forget? Who will we stay in contact with, when, if ever, will we come back to visit? Those are scary questions - they scare me all the time. But what comforts me is knowing that we don't need to remember everything for it to have been valuable. The life you led, the person you were, and the impact you left is permanent in the rest of us - collectively, nothing is left unremembered. In a speech I wrote for my 8th grade graduation, I said that we may have not been blessed with the ability to stop time, but we were blessed with the time itself. Four years later, and I'm not sure I can do much better than that. I want to thank you all so much for allowing me to come on this journey with you, and for welcoming me and loving me no matter what, even when I thought I didn't deserve it. I wish all of you nothing but the best, and I know that this is only the beginning for each of us. There's nowhere to go but up. I love you all very much, and I want to congratulate you for being here, and for making it through these last four years. Enjoy tonight, soak it in. You only get one. Everything is love. Thank you so much and have a good night.